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Technology Transfer in Developing Countries -a case study from Bolivia

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Abstract

Technology transfer from North to South has been essential to many development projects. Technology transfer has often focused on the *technological* element in the process often forgetting the people who were supposed to better their livelihood as a consequence of the technology transfer. Furthermore technology has been emphasised as *the* solution to development problems. This chapter gives a brief overview of types of development assistance and policy which emphasise participation, empowerment and good governance, thus in its discourse putting people in the centre of the development processes and projects. By analysing a case from Southern Bolivia and by adding insights from a study in Zimbabwe the discussion focuses on the consequences of development aid. An analysis of *unintended* consequences will be central to the discussion. The analysis will centre on a Bolivian case study where projects establishing green houses have been a tool used by several NGOs in the effort of bettering livelihoods for the poorer part of the rural populations.

Introduction

This chapter discusses development projects and their results in developing countries from a social constructivist point of departure. Furthermore the analysis will be inspired by Actor-Network Theory (ANT). The reason for combining these perspectives is to add new insights to the discussion of development projects and their impact in developing countries, especially in the cases of technology transfer. This discussion is relevant within techno-anthropology

(TAN) because TAN underpins the necessity to combine different disciplines in an interdisciplinary analysis, in this case of different themes within technology transfer and ‘beneficiaries’ in the so-called developing world. Development policy and projects often has a different point of departure and aim with development projects than receiving communities in for example rural Bolivia, as the case study in this chapter shows. And the technologies that are being transferred to a new social and cultural environment get a new meaning in their new environment, which technicians and planners are often unaware of. Or the technologies end up being of no use to the receivers. This chapter addresses these discussions: How do we understand the development projects as such? Who holds power over development projects? Which kind of technology is transferred? Inherent in these questions is a critique of the way development projects often are implemented in developing countries by Western donors. The focus of discussion will be a discussion of aspects in the socio-technology nexus in development assistance and will be discussing the question of how local people are affected by technology transfer in a particular case. A brief history of development as concept and policy will introduce the paradox of many development projects failing despite the supposed good intentions. One reason of why projects fail could be the inherent Eurocentric point of departure in science and technology (Müller 2011:9) Both the social constructivist view, here especially represented by the works of James Ferguson (Ferguson 1994; Ferguson & Lohmann 1994), and the ANT perspective can suggest new perspectives to the analysis of technology transfer in development projects. The analysis will include a presentation of a case from Southern Andean Bolivia.

Development theory, policy and practice has gone through many shifts during time since the first development aid was given in the form of the ‘Marshall Plan’ in Europe in the post-war period (Preston 1996; Parpart & Veltmeyer 2004). Technology transfer has been a dominating issue in many development projects through time. Recently, however, there are two dominating trends: Neoliberal development projects, which mainly focus on an economic development, and the alternative development perspective, here especially represented by the concepts of participation, empowerment and a focus on ‘good governance’. The discussion will include the technology transfer in the discussion of these different perspectives on development policies and in the analysis of these policies from a social constructivist and an ANT perspective.

Development Aid in Theory and Practice

Development aid started out on the basis of growth theory which was also the background for the first development aid given in modern times (after WWII). The European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan) was an aid program to post war Europe to allow reconstruction to begin (Preston 1996: 157). Inbuilt in growth theory (and in the later modernization theory) was ‘the logic of authoritative intervention’.

“Intervention in a social system might be understood as deliberate action whose objective is to bring about particular change in some set of circumstances and thereby achieve a preferred state of affairs” (Preston 1996: 159).

Modernization theory is much in line with the growth theory, but where growth theory aims to plan growth and repeat the experience of the first world in the third world, modernization theory has a more evolutionary aim of effecting a shift from traditional to modern society (Preston 1996: 155-167, Parpart & Veltmeyer 2004). This is exemplified by the fact that apart from financial and technical assistance development aid has also been an instrument in political processes in the cold war conflict and in post-colonialism (Parpart & Veltmeyer 2004: 40). Technology transfer has been central to much development assistance under the growth and modernization paradigms. The assumption has been that introducing technology would lead to growth and modernization ‘in itself’ leading to trickle-down effects for the poorest groups within society.

From the 1970s there was a gradual shift of development paradigms introducing other factors than economic growth and modernization to development thinking and practice.

Participation, empowerment and bottom-up perspectives began to dominate development theories and practice (Mikkelsen 2005). In the 1980s an additional shift came introducing the neoliberal “belief in the free market as the engine of development and the private sector as its driving force” (Parpart & Veltmeyer 2004: 40). The neoliberal shift and the alternative paradigm of bottom-up development have been trends in development policy and practice which have been running simultaneously.

Construction and ‘Objects/Otherness’

In his book “The Anti-Politics Machine (2004)” James Ferguson argues that development projects in Lesotho, where he has done his fieldwork, fail to achieve their stated objects due to the fact that projects are defined from a false premise, namely a ‘construction’ by development actors of Lesotho which has little to do with realities in the country.

In World Bank reports, which have served as background material for formulating development projects in the country, Lesotho was described as “basically a traditional subsistence peasant society” (World Bank Country Report on Lesotho (1975) quoted from Ferguson 1994:25). Ferguson shows in his analysis of Lesotho that this is far from the actual reality. That Lesotho is “virtually untouched by modern economic development” (Ferguson 1994:25) is simply not true. On the contrary Lesotho has served as a labour reserve for South African farms, industry and mines in particular. Furthermore Lesotho is not a ‘subsistence’ economy but rather a producer of cash crops for South African markets.

The central argument stated by Ferguson is that the World Bank (and other international donors) constructs a social and economic reality of Lesotho which has little to do with the actual facts. The reason for doing this, according to his argument, is for these organisations to be able to initiate a development process (a modernisation process) from the assumption that Lesotho is a less developed country, which must be lifted into modernity by the help of development projects and processes. A side effect of this is the fact that donors need to establish state structures through measures like for example good governance (Griddle 2004: 525), a civic apparatus which can meet the demands of Western donors (and not necessarily the demands of those who are to be ‘developed’).

“For many reform-minded citizens in developing countries, as well as for academics and practitioners in the international development community, good governance has become as imperative to poverty reduction as it has become to development more generally” (Griddle 2004: 25)

The object for development in Lesotho is thus the less developed subsistence economy which is to be lifted into a modern world of capital growth. However, as Ferguson shows in his analysis, Lesotho is not a country of subsistence farmers only, and yet donor policies are addressing the ‘modernisation’ of subsistence farmers. The reason for donor policies being created from this presumption is that it enables development work as such to function. The consequence of development projects for the local population in developing countries become of minor interest to the donors (Ferguson 1994).

Ziauddin Sardar has an explanation for this:

“The real power of the West is not located in its economic muscle and technological might. Rather, it resides in its power to define. The West defines what is, for example, freedom, progress and civil behaviour; law, tradition and community; reason mathematics and science; what is real and what it means to be human. The non-

western civilizations have simply to accept these definitions or be defined out of existence” (Sardar 199:44)

In their article ”Object Lessons” (2005)” Law and Singleton see objects as ‘messy’ objects, meaning that there is not a predefined truism of what the object contains. However in defining an object, one creates “otherness” (p.349). The method thus “is an ordering that makes otherness” (p.349). Seen in relation to development projects defining a project in practice creates an object (the ‘project’) but this is in itself an ordering which, according to Law’s and Singleton’s arguments, creates otherness – in this case the issues that falls outside of the defined development project such as context, which will be discussed later.

Actors

In the analysis of the Zimbabwe Bush Pump de Laet and Mol analyse a technology (the Bush Pump) as an actor in an ANT perspective:

“The Bush pump *does* all kinds of things, and we will explore some of its *activities*. Arguably, it *acts* as an actor” (de Laet & Mol 2008: 226).

The subtitle of de Laet’s and Mol’s article is “Mechanics of a Fluid Technology”. Fluidity encapsulates the Bush Pump as an actor with no clear-cut boundaries, but as de Laet and Mol show an actor can be non-rational and non-human as well as fluid without losing agency (de Laet and Mol 2008: 227). De Laet and Mol analyse the Bush Pump and its fluidity in the following way: It is a mechanical device but its fluidity is defined by the way it is being installed by the community (jointly), as being a health promoter (clean water) and being a nation-building apparatus in the sense that it is locally produced and helps to improve living standards in Zimbabwe and thus used in national political discourse as a way to enhance Zimbabwean unity (See chapter by Lars Botin in this volume for at similar discussion). This is a completely different way of perceiving technology and results in a way of analysing technology by including the ‘mess’ that lies outside a definable object, “an object that does not look like an object because our methods are not geared up to detect or know it” (Law and Singleton 2005: 334). What lies outside a certain reality is treated as

“more or less unknowable mess (this is the managerial opinion) or as technological failures to know realities that are wrongly assumed to be definite.” (Law and Singleton 2005:334)

De Laet and Mol set out to redefine what it means to be an *actor* and thus redefining the notion of actor/acting. Their argument is that the Bush Pump *does* all kind of things and therefore, in their point of view, the Bush Pump becomes an actor (de Laet & Mol 2000: 226). Apart from having the obvious function of providing clean water to communities the Bush Pump also becomes an actor in the community involving members of the community in its construction and maintenance. It is thus not ‘just’ a technology being introduced in rural Zimbabwe since it involves other (human) actors in the way it functions.

“It is designed so that the boring of the water hole, like the process of making the headworks and installing the pump, can be almost entirely ‘community-based’.” (de Laet & Mol 2000: 233).

The logic behind presenting these two different views on development projects from an analytical perspective is to point to the factors lying behind the actual development projects. In introducing a project in a certain locality in a developing country one must expect some changes. The question is, however, whether the changes will follow the blueprint of the development projects. As Ferguson states:

“Rather than repeatedly asking the politically naive question “Can aid programmes ever be made really to help poor people?” perhaps we should investigate the more searching question, “What do aid programmes do *besides* fail to help poor people”?” (Ferguson & Lohmann 1994:180).

So something does happen, one can regard this as ‘mess’ and look for the side effects of technology transfer and the effect this has on the people who are affected by development projects.

The Case¹

Technology transfer has been important in development projects and as part of the development agenda (Müller 2011). The following example is a case of adapted technology transfer in Bolivia.

¹ The case is based on a field work carried out by the author in 2008 in the Potosí department, Bolivia

Bolivia is a low-income country and has been one of the poorest countries in Latin America. Historically the economy has focused on natural resources and agricultural production from large farms (haciendas) in the subtropical and tropical parts of the country lying in the north and eastern parts of the country. Mining has been another important income generating activity for private owners and state. Business and administration has centred in the bigger cities of La Paz, Sucre and Santa Cruz.

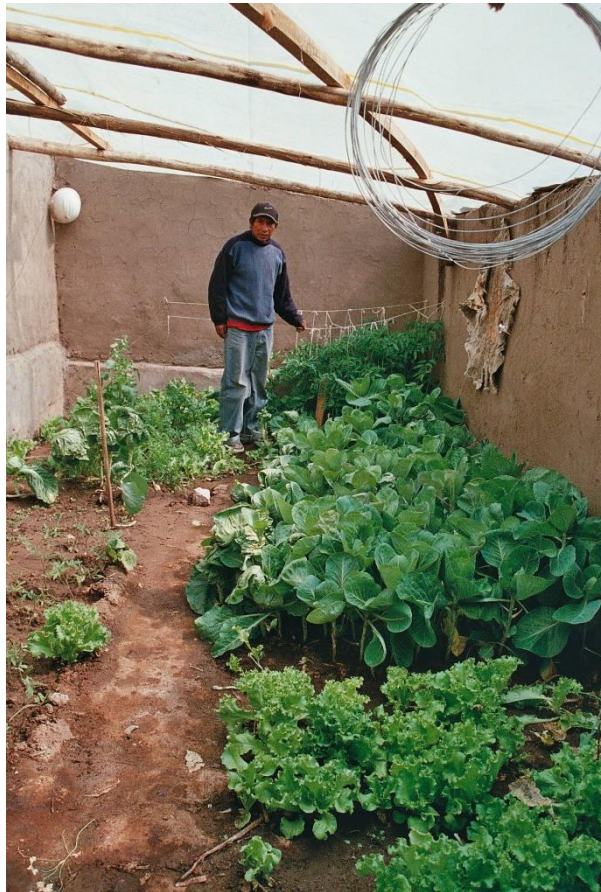
When the mining industry failed in Southern Bolivia, especially in the Potosí department, many people were fired and poverty increased. Many former mine workers were forced to migrate to the lowland Chapare region by government programs (Jeppesen 2004) but some stayed in the highland areas. Peasants in this area have lived on small farms, and poverty has increased in the areas since it is very difficult for local peasants to get enough agricultural products to sustain their livelihood.



Farm with green house (to the back of the picture). Photo: VA

In Southern Andean Bolivia the climate and soil is dry and climate change with diminishing rainfall has made circumstances even more difficult for the peasants, which has forced yet others to migrate – either temporarily to look for jobs in neighbouring Chile and Argentina or more permanently, primarily to the larger cities in Bolivia. NGOs are working to improve livelihood for the peasants staying behind in this area. Several of them have projects which help build green houses with local peasants in order to better nutrition (a majority of children under the age of five are malnourished), and to create a basis for income for local peasant women, since the idea is that the products will be consumed by the family and sold on local markets. NGOs have helped build green houses in different communities covering a large

area in the Potosí department. The idea behind the projects is an adapted technology transfer which takes into consideration that local material should be used and that it should be manageable for the peasants in the area. Therefore the construction material of the green house is adobe, which is used for building houses in this area, and the only material supplied from outside is the plastic roof and timber logs to keep the roof in place (see picture above and below).



Green house. Photo VA

Peasants in this area of Bolivia have not been used to working with green houses and cultivating vegetables of this type. The NGOs therefore have technicians who travel around the project area and assist people in building green houses and teach them how to cultivate vegetables. The idea of creating this form of development project was that it should be participatory, thereby involving the local population, especially the women, who were the main target as producers of vegetables. It should be income generating since the purpose was to sell products on the market and it should better general nutrition among the peasants, especially among children. There were problems, however: Transport to local markets was difficult so selling the products was often not possible. The cultivating of vegetables added an

extra work load to women's considerable workload and was therefore under prioritised when doing daily chores. The general knowledge about cultivation of vegetables was low, which created a dependency on the NGO technicians, who could only visit three times a year since they had to cover an enormous area, where the NGOs had initiated projects with green houses.

The Green House – a construction

Analysing the green house and its impact as development tool and instrument for relieving poverty and malnourishment (the goal from the point of view of the NGOs) as part of a network in ANT perspective might show new insights to why the project did not succeed as intended by the NGO – neither did former projects of creating green houses in the area. There were several ruins of green houses in communities in the area – green houses that were established by other NGOs as part of other development projects. In actor network theory a non-human actor can have agency by being part of a network as was seen in the case of the Zimbabwe Bush Pump. The Bush Pump was innovative in the sense that it was locally produced, that it demanded participation of everybody in the community in building and maintaining the pump and in that it met immediate needs of fresh water supply. The green house on the other hand, was not an initiative that came from communities themselves. This project had been formulated in (Western) NGO offices using 'Western' logic of what might benefit the community (Ferguson 1994). As mentioned above 'participation' has been one of the buzz words in international development for decades now. The problem is that the definition of 'participation' is primarily from the donors' perspective and the donors construct a 'reality' which fits the development 'business'.

“Development” agencies prefer to opt for standardized “development” packages. It suits the agencies to portray developing countries in terms that make them suitable targets for such packages. It is not surprising, therefore, that the “country profiles” on which the agencies base their interventions frequently bear little or no relation to economic and social realities.” (Ferguson & Lohmann 1994: 176)

Ferguson argues that international development and policy actors 'invent' a reality which suits their own needs in order to do development work. In the case of Lesotho the country was 'invented' by donors as an isolated place consisting of mainly subsistence farmers and therefore in need of 'development'. This 'rearranging of reality' is in Ferguson's analysis

seen as a way of blurring the fact that Lesotho has actually for years been involved in the world economy. This would clash with the ‘developer’s’ wish to bring about a transformation of a backward rural country into a modern and developed society (in accordance with the modernization theory). To achieve development agencies must rely on an actor – the state – to achieve development goals from the logic of ‘authoritative intervention’.

“One striking feature of the “development” discourse on Lesotho is the way in which the “development” agencies present the country’s economy and society as lying within the control of a neutral, unitary and effective national government and thus almost perfectly responsive to blueprints of planners. “The state” is seen as an impartial instrument for implementing plans and the government as a machine for providing social services and engineering growth” (Ferguson & Lohmann 1994: 178).

The result of this development logic is that development projects are removed far from the ones who should benefit from the projects in both planning and implementation process. This is clashing with the supposed aim of participatory approach within development which is on the agenda in much development work. ‘Participation’ is a concept (and a development practice) which is widely used, but the meaning of the concept has become blurred (Mikkelsen 2005:53)

“Yet participation is one of the most important concepts in development cooperation because it is potentially a vehicle for different stakeholders to influence development strategies and interventions” (Mikkelsen 2005:539)

Regarding participation as being a way of including all actors in the development process and in concrete development projects is a widely accepted fact within development work. But as we shall see ‘participation’ in itself does not secure a successful development project.

Seeing the state as primary actor within development processes can explain the focus on ‘good governance’ which is found in many development projects, but seen from the social constructivist point of view this is part of the social construction of actors in development. The State is created as the responsible counterpart in the development process with which development agencies can cooperate. Thus good governance, transparency and anti-corruption become important characteristics of making development projects work from the

donors' point of view. The problem is, according to Ferguson, that development projects remain a construction which is delinked from the reality of the countries in which the development agencies work.

In Law's and Singleton's analysis this schism is the "otherness" created in defining something as an object – here defining something as an object of development. In the process of defining something other factors escape the analysis, factors which might in fact have been able to cast new light on the analysis. The green house projects as constructed by (Western) NGOs are thus a supposed participatory development projects. It is participatory in the way that it claims to include the receivers of aid in the project by training them and by including the municipalities in the area where the NGO works in the planning process. The green house is defined as the object (by donors) and the failure of its impact on the supposed development process locally can be analysed as "mess" (Law & Singleton 2004), a technological failure, which falls outside the object.

In order to find explore this further the discussion will now focus on a discussion about the cases of the Zimbabwe Bush Pump and Bolivian green houses, presented above.

Pumps, Green Houses and Technology Transfer

"Development" is seen as something very real in development policy and practice. The aim behind development projects is often stated to be poverty alleviation, sustainable development, participation, empowerment, good governance etc. By defining a goal and some beneficiaries, development projects and practice automatically exclude something else – what lies outside and becomes 'invisible' to the practitioners. Excluding something also means turning a blind eye to context, as criticised by Ferguson in his study of Lesotho. This might be one of the reasons for development projects not succeeding the way they were intended to according to project plans. The argument here is by introducing the ANT perspective the analysis makes 'otherness' and 'mess' being visible. Additionally context comes to the core of analysis since no actor can be understood in itself. On the contrary actors must always be understood as parts of networks, which can be fluid (over time) and include non-human actors.

The Zimbabwean Bush Pump was an innovation by a Zimbabwean businessman. Apart from securing water supplies for rural communities in Zimbabwe the Pump also improved health (clean water) and served as a nation building apparatus internally in Zimbabwe (de Laet & Mol 200:252).

The ANT Perspective

Society is constructed by other elements than networks and the order they create – the relations. What is interesting to study here is the way a network is held together and “which links hold and which fall apart” (Murdoch 1998: 367 quoted from Ren et al 2012: 6). John Law emphasise the notion of *performativity* as crucial in understanding the importance of relations:

“ [...] the semiotic approach tells us that entities achieve their form as a consequence of the relations in which they are located. But this means that it also tells us that they are performed in, by, and through those relations” (Law 2007:4)

Because development projects are social constructions certain links are crucial. As mentioned previously there are certain elements that are necessary for a development project to come into being: A need has to be defined (poverty alleviation), actors have to be included (NGOs in developed and developing countries, ‘beneficiaries’), material need to be purchased, knowledge must be disseminated in a network generally dependent on the power relation which gives primary power to the donors. Thus the network of a development project like the project on green houses in Southern Bolivia includes several human and non-human actors. If we regard development projects as networks defined from Western perspective, which means *not* including the so-called ‘beneficiaries’ as actors in a network and thus not “*trans-acting* with its surrounding in processes which create and shape the individual and its surroundings simultaneously” (Ren et al 2012:12), the project is subject to have minor impact as we saw it in the case of the Bolivian green houses.

A development project relies on the performances of other actors in the development ‘network’. One very important actor is the logic behind ‘development’, meaning the aim of the processes. Currently two different tendencies are on the agenda, as mentioned earlier: The neoliberal paradigm of development policy and practice and the alternative paradigm (Parpart & Veltmeyer 2004). Other actors in the network are dependent on this logic and act accordingly. The logic of development projects makes an important actor in the network since other actors – like NGOs, recipients of aid, discourse and tools for development mutually interact in the network. The logic of development as part of a network also defines what is included – and what is not. What is outside this network might be seen as ‘mess’ (Law & Singleton 2005). The networks included in development work could be defined as “developmentscapes” (Mannan 2010) in line with Appadurai,

“who has used the suffix *scape* to indicate that given relations which do not objectively look the same from every angle of vision, but are rather deeply perspectival constructs. These constructs are influenced by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different actors like nation-states, multinationals, religious, political groupings, villages, families etc (Appadurai 199:226 cited from Mannan 2010:4)

In using network theory as point of departure for the analysis, the development project is not in the centre of analysis but rather seen as an actor in the field of development – or in the ‘developmentscape’ (Mannan 2010). In the case of the green houses one could argue that these are the centre of attention being the defined object for NGOs to facilitate poverty alleviation for local peasants. But in the understanding of Law & Singleton’s ‘mess’ greenhouses and their failing impact can be seen in fact as ‘mess’ – as something that lies outside the network circulating around the development project – even though it should be central according to the logic of the development project.

What from the donor’s point of view is central ‘*the development project*’ (the green house) can by using ANT and the concept of ‘mess’ be seen as something with a different role in a network precisely because the green house becomes an actor within a network and not something in itself. Ferguson’s question to what development programmes do *besides* fail to help poor people becomes relevant. The place of the green house in a network is different from a green house as a mean to an end, which is poverty reduction seen from the designers of development projects. But if this end goal is designed as a process without relevance and link to all actors (material and human) i.e. without taking context into consideration, the project is most likely to not work to better livelihood for local people in the developing countries.

Conclusion

In the introduction the questions of how to understand development as such, how to understand power relations in development projects and how to understand consequences of projects were posed. The discussion of the Zimbabwe Bush Pump and the Bolivian green houses analysed by use of social construction perspective and ANT can point towards an initial explanation to the processes inherent in development assistance and practice. Using ANT as point of departure in the analysis of the Bolivian green houses has pointed to some unintended consequences as a result of introducing green houses. The power relations in the

introduction of green houses have been different which could point to power relations on all levels (in this case international (Western NGO) national and local) being crucial in understanding development processes on a local scale. The aim of improving health by introducing vegetable locally did not come through in the case analysed. On the contrary a 'messy situation (Law & Singleton) occurred since women's workload increased. The idea of introducing a green, sustainable technology with so called participatory measures might look logical from the point of departure of the power holders (municipality and Western NGO), but the unintended consequences in this case supersede the advantage that was intended in introducing the project. The insights into power structures, context, a conviction of technology as *the* solution gained through the analysis have shown that technology transfer without including the human aspect is not feasible within development projects.

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